

Message

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Subject: USS Lead - Press - Alcamo and Garypie Quotes

East Chicago press clips
 US EPA Region 5 – prepared by the Office of Public Affairs
 October 23, 2017

Post Tribune EPA considers alternatives for West Calumet cleanup

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-east-chicago-zone1-alternatives-st-1022-20171021-story.html>

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is reviewing alternative options to remediate East Chicago's West Calumet Housing Complex, a move community ...

EPA considers alternatives for West Calumet cleanup

Craig Lyons, Post Tribune Oct. 21, 2017

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is reexamining its plans to clean up East Chicago's now-closed West Calumet Housing Complex.

The EPA is working on a feasibility study that will explore alternatives for the remediation of the complex once the demolition is complete, said Tom Alcamo, a remedial project manager with the EPA.

"We're amending the current remedy that's in place," Alcamo said.

The EPA will go back into negotiations with the potentially responsible parties, that will fund the cleanup, with the new remediation plans, Alcamo said, and the agency will look at alternatives including capping the site to digging to native sand.

The EPA's initial record of decision, released in 2012, planned to remediate the contaminated soil at the housing complex without displacing residents or tearing down any buildings. The intention to simply dig out the soil was the plan funded through the 2014 consent decree.

"We're doing an addendum to the feasibility study," Alcamo said.

When East Chicago Mayor Anthony Copeland, in July 2016, notified residents they would have to move and he intended to have the complex demolished, the EPA had to revisit that plan.

Residents see the EPA revisiting the remediation plans for the site as a chance to get more input into what's happening at the U.S.S. Lead Superfund site, according to court documents.

A group of residents and advocacy organizations last year filed in federal court to get intervenor status in the case between the companies held responsible for the contamination in the Calumet neighborhood and the EPA and Department of Justice. The residents argued, in court filings, that recent developments at the site and changes to the remediation plans should leverage their request to have a role in court proceedings.

Federal Magistrate Judge Paul Cherry, in his order, said that residents received notice of the EPA's cleanup plan in 2012 and the 2014 consent decree filed in court and published in the federal register, noting both those events provided opportunities for them to comment.

"Applicants should have known about their interest in this case two years prior to their filing the motion to intervene," Cherry wrote.

Attorneys for the residents argued that the judge should have considered the element of timeliness in the context of the history of the site, where it took decades to stop companies from polluting the neighborhood; the EPA didn't declare it a Superfund site for 24 years; funding for the cleanup wasn't negotiated until 5 years after the Superfund designation; significant cleanup didn't start for two years; and the EPA, in 2016, began telling residents about the high levels of contamination.

The residents and advocacy groups have now appealed the magistrate's ruling.

Catherine Garypie, associate region counsel for EPA Region 5, said the agency's main concern with the motion to intervene was that it came too far into the remediation process.

"Our concern was that it was late," Garypie said. "That was our big issue."

On a national level, Garypie said the statute includes the time element to keep the process moving forward.

"The big concern is we don't want to slow down cleanup," Garypie said.

Maritza Lopez, a resident and leader of the East Chicago Calumet Coalition, said the EPA and Department of Justice think that residents and interested parties got enough notice to participate in the process back in 2012 but many people weren't aware of what was happening.

"The residents were left out of this," Lopez said.

It wasn't until the mayor spoke up about the contamination at West Calumet that many residents realized the extent of the problem, Lopez said, and that wasn't until 2016.

"That opened our eyes," Lopez said.

Copeland has asked the EPA repeatedly to clean the site to residential standards as the reuse of the site is now being explored.

Alcamo said the demolition application to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development did not give any indication of the future use of the former housing complex.

"Officially, it's nothing," Alcamo said.

The remediation alternatives and ultimate plan to remove the contaminated material will follow what the future use of the site will be, Alcamo said.

Once the new plans are developed, the EPA will release those alternatives, Alcamo said, and collect public feedback.

"There will be a whole other public process," Alcamo said.

The EPA said it will take public comment when amendments to the record of decision are proposed, according to the agency, and if changes to the consent decree are needed, another chance for the public to comment will be made available.

The EPA has told HUD and the East Chicago Housing Authority it would like to review bid specifications for the demolition, Alcamo said, and have been told it will have that opportunity.

"The whole place is getting torn down," Alcamo said.

The approval HUD gave the East Chicago Housing Authority only allows the demolition of the buildings and removal of roadways, sidewalks and foundations, according to Alcamo. HUD blocked plans to remove underground utilities, according to the final decision issued by the federal housing agency.

"That is kind of big news," Alcamo said.